Concerns, Thoughts & Perceptions

Concerning Curriculum & ELLs/ESL

It occurs to me that the purpose of attending a course focusing particularly on methodology and pedagogy related to ELLs/ESL students, is that I will inevitably have these students in my classroom. How will I meet the needs of these students? How can I differentiate lessons to include all students? What is the most important aspect of ELL/ESL language development? How will having an ELL in my classroom affect classroom management?

The questions are almost endless. My thoughts about teaching have always been somewhat romantic. You know, a classroom filled with bubbly and adoring students who just can’t wait to get started on the next lesson—because I am such a great teacher who always makes learning fun. The realization is that kids are not always bubbly and adoring, and becoming a great teacher will take time and patience. Now, this idea of a utopian classroom never included students who did not know how to speak English! (If this blog had a soundtrack, here is where you would hear the ‘earch’ of the needle-scratch on vinyl.)

With the switch to CCSS and with teacher accountability being tied directly to student standardized test scores, the responsibility becomes even more pressing. How do I make time in the classroom to investigate lessons to the depth that they must be studied in order to facilitate deeper-level learning of all students—including ELLs/ESL? I am afraid that learning for these students will be put on a back burner, where the knowledge simmers but the heat of comprehension is never increased and learning never boils.

There are various methods that can be implemented to aide ELL/ESL students. Some of these methods include graphic organizers, the use of realia, and peer grouping. While I know that these methods *can* be used, I am not completely comfortable with their proper use. How will I know when to use what strategy? How will I know which students to group together? Am I doing too much? Am I doing too little? Using the wrong strategy will cause confusion. Improper student grouping will cause the students unnecessary frustration. Doing too much will not allow the student to experience growth. Doing too little will leave the student flustered and confused.

Putting curriculum aside for a moment, I wish to express my concern that in addition to academia, I will be conducting lessons of tolerance, patience, and empathy to a classroom full of children. These lessons are as important to the cognitive development of students as are lessons of academia. In order for students to explore, to ask questions, and to make mistakes, they must feel safe in their environment.

The challenges I am facing are not easy ones. It will take time, study, and perseverance to overcome these apprehensions. The journey is just beginning and there is a long road ahead. I’m putting on comfortable shoes.